

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Vol. 38 No. 6 Nov. / Dec. 1998



■ Editorial

- Kihim Diary
- Naturalist, by Edward O. Wilson .



■ Articles

- Birds of Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary in Western Arunachal Pradesh, by Aparajita Datta, Pratap Singh, Ramana M. Athreya and S. Karthikeyan
- Glimpses of Kenyan Bird Life, by S. Ashok Kumar, IAS (Retd.)
- At Home with the Spotted Munias, by Thomas F. Martin
- Rare Species of Bird at Thiruvananthapuram, by K.B. Sanjayan
- Unexplored Wetland of Uttar Pradesh, by Mohd. Zafar-ul Islam

■ Abstracts

- Birding in the Andamans, by Prof. A. Relton
- Nest-making and breeding of the Purplerumped Sunbirds, by Dr. Satish A. Pande
- Unusual Tail Pattern of Bronzed Drongo, by R. Shyama Prasad Rao.

■ Correspondence

- Grey Babbler attacking its reflection, by J.L. Singh
- Koel boom at Jodhpur, by Dr. Ishwar Prakash
- Black Bulbuls and *Melia azedarach*, by M.L. Narang & R.S. Rana
- Save the Heronry at Mathikere, by Dr. J.C. Uttangi
- Spotbill Pelican in Jakkur Lake, by George Verghese
- Large clutch size in Grey Francolins, by J.K. Tiwari
- Darters & Little Egrets Nesting in Gudavi Bird Sanctuary, by Gurunath Desai
- Asian Anatidae Atlas, by Asad R. Rahmani
- Costly Geese : \$ 5.3 million at J.F. Kennedy Airport. Courtesy, *International Herald Tribune* of 11.11.98
- 23rd International Ornithological Congress to be held in China 11-17th August 2002

■ Book Review

- Communities & Conservation, by Zafar Futehally

Wishing all our readers a very happy and successfui New Year - 1999

Kihim Diary

This year the rains have broken all records and the unseasonal downpour in Bombay continued until November. 80% of the paddy crop is ruined and the story of rotting onions with prices rising up to Rs. 60/- a kg is well known. The village tank in Kihim is full to the brim but with all the vegetation cleared the birds were few and far between. Pond herons, cattle egrets, red wattled lapwings, a cormorant and the unfailing white breasted kingfisher were the lot when we arrived on 28th October. But for the rest of the time we were there (till 23rd November) there was often a couple of gull-billed terns circling the tank, diving (after their miraculous reverse twist) to pick up prey from the surface of the water.

There is no progress about our proposal to make the tank into a bird sanctuary. But one day a couple from Nagpur turned up to look at the house where Salim Ali stayed. They were apparently planning a seminar on birdwatching somewhere near Karad, on 12th November, (S.A.'s birthday). They offered to pass a resolution on the Kihim tank sanctuary and to send it to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and to the Collector of Raigad District. That is the sort of support we need and I request readers of the Newsletter around Mumbai to do the same. The beach was full of plovers (lesser, kentish, ringed) and sandpipers (Terek's too with their red legs & upturned beaks), oyster catchers, turnstone, whimbrel, red shanks and others. The plovers were unusually aggressive and I saw collisions in mid air on a few occasions. Obviously they had just arrived from their breeding grounds in the north and were still territorially inclined. On 15th November during high tide at 9 a.m. the beach was fuller than usual with birds and a pair of Caspian terns with their lovely red bills were circling around gull-billed terns. There was a solitary reef heron in its dark uniform. As it flew the two white spots at the edge of the primaries looked very decorative. Why has this colour pattern not been mentioned in the books? It is such an arresting sign like the two white spots on the tiger's ears.

At the extreme north of Kihim beach which is separated from the Awas region by the creek, there is a very productive scrub jungle with plenty of lantana where bulbuls flourish. A flock of grey headed mynas, were enjoying the berries of the lantana. I see that the alternate common name (A.C.N.) suggested for the species is chestnut tailed myna. I hope the original name will survive.

Not far from here on two occasions, I saw a lovely solitary specimen of a minivet on a telegraph wire, but its colours, pink throat, yellow breast, dark grey body do not match with the illustrations in the books. Common grey hornbills, small green bee eaters, redwhiskered and red-vented bulbuls, spotted doves, and jungle babblers were the commonest birds in our

garden. The calls of coucals were aplenty. I keep wondering at the meaning of their numbered calls 4 to 6 and more in regular patterns. Paradise flycatchers were often seen and a birder reported a large group of bluetailed bee eaters *Merops philippinus* in a casuarina grove by the beach. I recall seeing a large flock 30 years ago in the same place, and their calls *te-tew te-tew* by which I identified them, are fresh in my memory.

On 12th November on the road to Kankeshwar I found a few turtle doves in the same spot where I saw them in May (reported in the Newsletter of May/June 98).

Just as I was wondering about the absence of wagtails I saw a couple of white wagtails *Motacilla alba* on the beach. From their black and white facial markings I could not tell whether they were *personata* or *dukhunensis*.

But the sight that thrilled me the most was of a blackcapped kingfisher on the rocks on the beach just opposite our house where it has often been seen in the past. At 9 a.m. on 13th November, the light was perfect and the bird's velvet black cap, broad white collar on the hind neck, blood red bill, pink legs and rusty brown underneath showed up to perfection. For a moment it flew on to the ground and came back to the same spot on the rock with a beakful. The morsel protruded beyond the mandibles and it took over 5 minutes to crush it to a swallowable size. This bird is certainly a candidate for a beauty competition among avians.

Naturalists by Edward O. Wilson

Every one who has read this book will agree that it is "one of the finest scientific memoirs ever written". As one reviewer says, "no one has been able to connect a "humble detail" so effectively to a "grand vision". So whether it is the life of ants, the subject of Wilson's book, or birds, it is the humble detail which must not be ignored. Every page of this book has a fascinating ecological insight but one which particularly pleased me was the author's comment on the concept of sub-species. In our Newsletter I have often omitted the

trinomial sub-species mainly because sub-species are unidentifiable in the field, and one is likely to make a mistake. But there are other reasons why the concept of sub-species is a questionable one. Listen to Wilson, page 207.

"It was a subject deserving close inspection. Everywhere taxonomists were treating the sub-species as an objective category and one of the key steps of evolution. Consider their logic : species are divided into subspecies, which we must assume to be real and objective because given enough time they evolve into species, which are real and objective. Subspecies were (and still are) given formal latinized names by taxonomists. The bald eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* for example, is a species divided by taxonomists into two such races, the southern bald eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus leucocephalus* and the northern bald eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus washingtoniensis*.

"For reasons not immediately clear to Brown and me, subspecies seemed insubstantial and arbitrary. We set out to conduct a critical review of the premises behind their recognition, by looking at real cases. The foundations proved even weaker than we had imagined. We discovered that the geographic limits of subspecies are often hard or impossible to draw, because the traits used to define them vary in a discordant pattern. The nature of the discordance can be most immediately understood with an imaginary but typical example: colour in a butterfly species varies east to west, size decreased from north to south, and an extra band appears on the hind wing in a few localities near the centre. And so on for any number of traits the taxonomist might choose from an almost endless list available for classification. It follows that the identity of the subspecies into which the butterfly species is divided depends on the traits chosen to define them. Pick colour, and you have two east-west races. Pick colour plus size, and four races in a quadrant come into existence. Add the hind-wing band, and the number of races can double again. Hence the subspecies are arbitrary."

In short, there is a great deal of subjective element in deciding about the subspecies, and this is something we have to bear in mind.



Birds of Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary in Western Arunachal Pradesh, North East India

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During the course of a 6 month study (November 1995 to April 1996) on the response of arboreal mammals to selective logging in Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent reserve forests in Western Arunachal Pradesh, about 150 bird species sighted were recorded by the first author.

A total of 256 bird species has now been recorded from the area, the bulk of which were sighted by the second author. Pakhui WLS (92° 7.5'E to 92° 22' E and 26° 53.7' N to 27° 16.2' N) covers an area of 862 km² and is bounded to the north and west by the river Bhareli, to the east by the Pakke

river and to the south by the Nameri WLS and reserve forests of Assam.

The sanctuary is criss-crossed by a number of small rivers and perennial streams of the Bhareli and Pakke rivers, both of which join the Brahmaputra river. The area lies in the foothills of the Himalaya and the terrain is undulating and hilly. The altitude ranges from 200 m to above 1500 m above sea level. The area has a subtropical climate with cold weather from November to February. Both the south-west and north-east monsoon are prevalent here. The average annual rainfall is 2500 mm.

The general vegetation type is tropical semi-evergreen (Champion & Seth, 1968). The vegetation is dense with a high diversity and density of woody lianas and climbers. A total of 234 plant species (angiosperms) was recorded here with a high representation of species from the Euphorbiaceae and Lauraceae families (Datta & Goyal, in prep). The major emergent species are *Tetrameles nudiflora* and *Altingia excelsa* (Singh, 1991). The forest types include tropical semi-evergreen forests along the lower plains and foothills dominated by *Terminalia myriocarpa*, *Allanthus grandis* and *Duabanga grandiflora* (Singh, 1991). There are certain patches of tropical evergreen forests dominated by *Altingia excelsa*, *Mesua ferrea*, *Dysoxylum* species, and middle storey trees belonging to Lauraceae and Myrtaceae. The hill tops are dominated by subtropical broadleaved forests of the Fagaceae. Moist areas near streams have a profuse growth of bamboo, canes and a palm species, *Livistonia jenkinsii*, locally known as Tokko, which is extensively used as thatch. Along the larger perennial streams, there are shingle beds with patches of tall grassland, which give way to lowland moist forests with *Dillenia indica* and *Talauma hodgsonii*. Human settlements along with some cultivation existed in a small area in the southern part of the sanctuary in Khari area in the past as evinced by abandoned clearings and gaps with thick weedy undergrowth. Cane extraction on a commercial basis occurred here till 1991. Occasionally cane-cutters enter the forests here from the adjacent reserve forests of Assam. Villagers also come into the sanctuary to fish and to collect honey, agar from *Aquilaria agallocha* and dhuna from *Canarium* species. A small part of the forest near the southern boundary had also undergone some felling in the past before the area was declared a sanctuary in 1978. This area had several colonizing species such as *Bauhinia purpurea* and *Mallotus* sp. common in secondary forests.

A vast portion in the central and northern part of the sanctuary is quite inaccessible due to the dense vegetation, hilly terrain and the lack of trails. Consequently, very few people, even local tribals, venture into the interior of the forest. The sole village, Mabusa, to the south of the sanctuary has been relocated. One or two settlements are present near the northern boundary. The Bhareli river acts as a barrier to the pressures of human disturbance, though occasionally local tribals may cross over. Therefore, most of Pakhui WLS, except a small strip to the south, has undisturbed primary forest.

Phenological data on trees in 210.25 ha plots is being gathered to document the fruiting patterns in these forests. Certain hypotheses regarding the factors underlying fruiting patterns would also be tested. Besides information on hornbill diet, breeding biology, roosting and nesting habitat and their effectiveness as seed dispersers, data on frugivore assemblages at fruiting trees and overlap in food species among frugivorous birds is being collected during observations at fruiting trees (mainly figs) and *adlibitum* sighting records of bird species on fruit trees. At fruiting figs visited by hornbills, the other frugivorous birds are mainly the pintailed green pigeon (flocks over 100 at any one time), the lined barbet, blue-throated barbet, the hill myna and the fairy bluebird.

Notes on some birds of the area (by Aparajita Datta)

Of the waterbirds, the black stork is usually sighted along the perennial streams in Khari area. This year, I saw a flock of more than 20 on Khari nala, though usually solitary birds or pairs are more commonly seen. I also saw juvenile storks on a number of occasions. Common mergansers are usually seen in winter (from November to February) both on the Pakke and Bhareli river. In the winter of 1995-96, bigger flocks were seen throughout the day in Pakke river. In the last two years, fewer birds were seen. In the early morning, a few hunters often take potshots at these birds. In February 1997, I saw a tribal hunter trying to retrieve a merganser he had shot in the fast-flowing water. Gunshots are commonly heard from the river in the morning.

I have sighted the ibisbill only on Khari nala, though RA & SK have sighted these birds even on the Bhareli river in Tipi. Once I recovered an injured bird from the nala which had probably been pecked at by some raptor. Again, this year, I did not see any ibisbills on the nala.

The Elwe's crane was sighted around a still natural pool in the middle of dense evergreen forest (probably one of the finest patches of undisturbed primary forest in Pakhui). This pool is called Pukhri and is situated on top of a plateau. It is about 10 km from Khari and one has to cross the various meandering streams of the Khari nala more than 20 times on the way to this area. This pool is stagnant, and is probably formed by rain water collecting in a natural depression. There is overhanging vegetation, floating logs and the area seems like an ideal habitat for the white-winged wood duck. In fact, the white-winged wood duck occurs in the adjacent Nameri National Park in Assam, so it is likely that this duck occurs here too. Pratap Singh and I saw the rare green cochoa on a walk through this dense forest. It was the first and only sighting of the species here.

There are a total of 9 species of pigeons and doves occurring here. Of this, I have sighted flocks of the grey-fronted green pigeon feeding on fruits of a *Garruga* species, while large flocks of pin-tailed green pigeons were the only pigeons sighted feeding on fruiting figs such as *Ficus nervosa*, *Ficus elastica* and *Ficus hookeriana*. I have several observations of the bar-tailed cuckoo dove feeding on the very small black juicy fruits of several medium-sized trees such as

Callicarpa sp. and *Ostodes paniculata* (locally called Khujli-pat). Barbets and maroon oriole on the other hand were very commonly seen feeding on fruits of *Hovenia acerba* which are also eaten by locals here. The small rounded black ripe fruits of *Vitex pentaphylla* formed a very important food source for the smaller frugivorous birds from December to February. The fruits of the palm species, *Livistonia jenkinsii* are also an important food source for frugivorous birds and mammals from October to January. There was a total failure in fruiting of this species in the winter of 1995-96, but this year, most individuals had large fruit crops. Flocks of hill mynahs, pigeons, fairy bluebirds were common on fruiting individuals of this species. They also form an important food source for hornbills in this period, since most of their food species ripen later during the breeding season. There is a dearth of fleshy ripe berries of lipid-rich capsular fruits during the period. Hornbills share their fig fruit resource mainly with barbets, hill mynahs and green pigeons. Among non-fig fruits, only species bearing medium-sized fleshy berries seem to be shared by barbets and hill mynahs. Over 20 food species for hornbills have been identified during this study. A captive wreathed hornbill was fed fruits of these species to determine gut passage rates.

An amazing 13 species of woodpeckers are recorded here. The goldenbacked, yellownaped and rufous woodpeckers are very common. The great slaty woodpecker uses treeholes on trees of *Tetrameles nudiflora* for nesting. So do redbreasted parakeets, hill mynas and of course the hornbills. Nests of magpie-robin and the shama were also observed in tree hollows or holes.

Bulbuls are represented by 8 species here, of which the most common species is the white-throated bulbul, flocks of which are very conspicuous due to their noisy calls. I observed a nest of the blacknecked yellow bulbul in April 1997. The nest was a cup-shaped structure knit together with small thin twigs, bark shreds and dry leaves and spider webs on a shrub about 2 m from the ground. The nest was right on the edge of a forest path used by Forest Department staff under a tall *Tetrameles* tree in which there was a wreathed hornbill nest which I used to observe regularly. The bulbul nest had two newly-hatched chicks on 8th April and there was usually one parent in attendance throughout, but since there was regular movement of people, the agitated parent would fly away nearby and return again when the coast was clear. A few days later while I was watching the hornbill nest, there was a commotion near the bulbul nest and I suddenly saw two crows flying low and a flurry of feathers in the air. They had killed one parent. I would visit the nest, in the next two-three days to feed the two chicks with little insects and rice grains. They were still altricial, and one chick was more active and stronger, so all the food I gave was taken by only this chick. I saw no sign of the other parent for at least a week, then one day to my surprise, I saw a bulbul sitting on the nest. Maybe the other parent had been in attendance throughout. By this time, the wing feathers of both chicks had developed and a few days later when I inspected the nest, I found an empty nest. But I wonder if they

were big enough to have flown or were killed by predators, though the nest was still intact and there were no other signs of predation.

I have also seen the nests of the largely solitary blue-bearded bee-eater which is more of a forest bird than the other two bee-eaters recorded here, viz. the chestnut-headed and bluetailed bee-eater which are in larger flocks near open grassy areas near rivers, cliff sides and streams. The nests of the bluebearded bee-eater was on the soft clayey soil banks along sides of trails in the forest. They excavated tunnel-like holes in the soil.

Two birds recorded in the list here were sighted at much lower altitudes than reported by Ali (1983). These were the scarlet finch, a flock of which I actually saw just outside Pakhui in the Doimara R.F. at about 900 m elevation. Another species is the grey-headed parrotbill, which I saw again in Doimara R.F. near Tipi.

Several roost sites of hornbills were identified. Roost trees were generally tall thinly-foliaged deciduous trees near the river banks, cliff edges of perennial streams. The main roost tree species were *Bombax ceiba*, *Tetrameles nudiflora*, and *Albizia* sp. At some roosts only small flocks of a single species such as either the great or wreathed hornbill were seen. But sometimes roosts were of both species together in the same location along the cliff edges at these roost sites. This year in January, over 150 wreathed hornbills and about 100 great hornbills roosted at the same location every evening. Flocks of the smaller Indian pied hornbill also roosted some distance away from the other two species near the river.

Relative abundances (encounter rates) of both pheasants and hornbills were recorded along trails during the logging study in 1995-96. Pheasant abundance was found to be lowest in logged forest and plantation (Doimara and Papum R.F.) and highest in unlogged forest (Datta, *in prep.*). While wreathed hornbill abundance did not differ between habitats, the great hornbill was more abundant in unlogged forest and the Indian pied hornbill occurred only near river margin secondary forests (Datta, *in review*).

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Checklist of birds of Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary (East Kameng district, Western Arunachal Pradesh)

The initials after each species refer to species sighted only by one of the authors.

Family : *Phalacrocoracidae*

1) Large cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*; 2) Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* AD; 3) Indian darter *Anhinga rufa* RA & SK

Family : *Ardeidae*

4) Indian pond heron *Ardeola grayii*; 5) Little green heron *Ardeola striatus*; 6) Little egret *Egretta garzetta*; 7) Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* PS

Family : *Ciconiidae*

8) Black stork *Ciconia nigra*

Family : *Threskiornithidae*

9) White ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* PS

Family : *Anatidae*

10) Common merganser *Mergus merganser*

Family : *Accipitridae*

11) Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* AD; 12) Crested hawk-eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*; 13) Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*; 14) White-backed vulture *Gyps benghalensis*; 15) Blyth's baza *Aviceda jerdoni*; 16) Pariah kite *Milvus migrans govinda* RA & SK; 17) Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* RA & SK; 18) Short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus* RA & SK; 19) Honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* PS; 20) Hodgson's hawk-eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* PS; 21) Pied harrier *Circus melanoleucos* PS; 22) Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* PS; 23) Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* PS; 24) Shikra *Accipiter badius* PS

Family : *Falconidae*

25) Whitelegged falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*; 26) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* PS

Family : *Phasianidae*

27) White-cheeked hill partridge *Arborophila atrogularis* PS; 28) Kaleej pheasant *Lophura leucomelana lathamii*; 29) Red jungle fowl *Gallus gallus*; 30) Peacock pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*

Family : *Rallidae*

31) Elwe's crane *Amauromis bicolor*; 32) Whitebreasted waterhen *Amauromis phoenicurus* AD

Family : *Ibidorhynchidae*

33) Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Family : *Burhinidae*

34) Stone curlew *Burhinus oedipnemos* AD

Family : *Glareolidae*

35) Small Indian pratincole *Glareola lactea*

Family : *Charadriidae*

36) Redwattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*; 37) Spurwinged lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*; 38) Green sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*; 39) Common greenshank *Tringa nebularia*; 40) Blacktailed godwit *Limosa limosa* PS; 41) Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*; 42) Little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*

Family : *Laridae*

43) Indian river tern *Sterna aurantia*

Family : *Columbidae*

44) Pintailed green pigeon *Treron apicauda*; 45) Pompadour or greyfronted green pigeon *Treron pompadora*; 46) Thick-billed green pigeon *Treron curvirostra*; 47) Green imperial pigeon *Ducula aenea*; 48) Mountain imperial pigeon *Ducula badii*; 49) Bartailed cuckoo dove *Macropygia unchaf*; 50) Rufous turtle dove *Streptopelia orientalis*; 51) Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*; 52) Emerald dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Family : *Psittacidae*

53) Redbreasted parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*; 54) Indian lorikeet *Loriculus vernalis*; 55) Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* RA & SK

Family : *Cuculidae*

56) Rufousbellied plaintive cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*; 57) Large greenbilled malkoha *Rhopodytes tristis*; 58) Lesser coucal *Centropus loulou*; 59) Drongo-cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*; 60) Indian cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* PS

Family : *Strigidae*

61) Barred owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*; 62) Spotted owlet *Athene brama* PS; 63) Scops owl *Otus scops* PS; 64) Collared scops owl *Otus bakkamoena* PS; 65) Brown hawk owl *Ninox scutulata* PS; 66) Forest eagle-owl *Bubo nipalensis* AD

Family : *Caprimulgidae*

67) Longtailed nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*

Family : *Apodidae*

68) House swift *Apus affinis* AD; 69) Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*; 70) Large whiterumped swift *Apus pacificus*; 71) Cochinchina spinetail swift *Chaetura cochinchinensis* PS; 72) Himalayan swift *Collocalia brevirostris* RA & SK

Family : *Trogonidae*

73) Red-headed trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus*



Family : Alcedinidae

74) Himalayan pied kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris*; 75) Lesser pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*; 76) Small blue kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*; 77) Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smymensis*; 78) Blue-eared kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* PS; 79) Ruddy kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda* PS

Family : Meropidae

80) Chestnutheaded bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*; 81) Bluebearded bee-eater *Nyctornis athertoni*; 82) Bluetailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus* PS

Family : Coraciidae

83) Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*; 84) Broadbilled roller *Eurystomus orientalis*

Family : Upupidae

85) Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Family : Bucerotidae

86) Rufousnecked hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* AD?, PS; 87) Wreathed hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus*; 88) Indian pied hornbill *Anihraceros malabaricus*; 89) Great pied hornbill *Buceros bicornis*

Family : Capitonidae

90) Great hill barbet *Megalaima virens*; 91) Lineated barbet *Megalaima lineata*; 92) Bluethroated barbet *Megalaima asiatica*; 93) Blueeared barbet *Megalaima australis*

Family : Picidae

94) Rufous piculet *Sasia ochracea*; 95) Large yellownaped woodpecker *Picus flavinucha*; 96) Small yellownaped woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus*; 97) Larger goldenbacked woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*; 98) Great slaty woodpecker *Mulleripicus pulverulentus*; 99) Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* AD; 100) Fulvous breasted pied woodpecker *Picoides macei* AD; 101) Redeared bay woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis* AD; 102) Speckled piculet *Picumnus innominatus* PS; 103) Grey-crowned pygmy woodpecker *Picoides canicapillus* PS; 104) Rufous woodpecker *Micropterus brachyurus*; 105) Blacknaped green woodpecker *Picus canus* PS; 106) Pale headed woodpecker *Gecinulus grantia* PS

Family : Eurylaimidae

107) Collared broadbill *Serilophus lunatus*; 108) Long tailed broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae*

Family : Pittidae

109) Bluenaped pitta *Pitta nipalensis* RA & SK; 110) Hooded or Greenbreasted pitta *Pitta sordida* PS

Family : Alaudidae

111) Bush lark *Mirafra assamica* PS; 112) Eastern skylark *Alauda gulula* PS

Family : Hirundinidae

113) Swallow *Hirundo rustica*; 114) Collared sand martin *Riparia riparia* PS, RA & SK?

Family : Laniidae

115) Greybacked shrike *Lanius tephronotus*; 116) Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus*; 117) Rufousbacked shrike blackheaded subspecies *Lanius schach tricolor* PS

Family : Oriolidae

118) Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthomus*; 119) Maroon oriole *Oriolus trailii*

Family : Dicruridae

120) Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*; 121) Grey drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*; 122) Bronzed drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*; 123) Lesser racket-tailed drongo *Dicrurus remifer*; 124) Haircrested drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*; 125) Greater racket-tailed drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*

Family : Artamidae

126) Ashy swallow-shrike *Artamus fuscus*

Family : Sturnidae

127) Greyheaded mynah *Sturnus malabaricus*; 128) Pied mynah *Sturnus contra* PS; 129) Common mynah *Acridotheres tristis*; 130) Jungle mynah *Acridotheres fuscus* PS; 131) Grackle or hill mynah *Gracula religiosa*

Family : Corvidae

132) Green magpie *Cissa chinensis*; 133) Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* RA & SK; 134) Blackbrowed tree pie *Dendrocitta frontalis*; 135) Himalayan tree pie *Dendrocitta formosae*; 136) House crow *Corvus splendens*; 137) Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Family : Campephagidae

138) Large wood shrike *Tephrodromis virgatus*; 139) Common wood shrike *Tephrodromis pondicerianus*; 140) Large cuckoo shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*; 141) Smaller grey cuckoo shrike *Coracina melaschistos*; 142) Scarlet minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*; 143) Longtailed minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*; 144) Shortbilled minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris*; 145) Yellowthroated minivet *Pericrocotus solaris* PS

Family : Irenidae

146) Gold fronted chloropsis *Chloropsis aurilrons*; 147) Orangebellied chloropsis *Chloropsis hardwickii*; 148) Fairy bluebird *Irena puella*; 149) Common lora *Aegithina tiphia*

Family : Pycnonotidae

150) Blackheaded yellow bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus*; 151) Whitecheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*; 152) Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*; 153) Redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*; 154) Whitethroated bulbul *Criniger flaveolus*; 155) Browneared bulbul *Hypsipetes flavalus*; 156) Black bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*; 157) Rufous-bellied bulbul *Hypsipetes mccllellandi* PS

Family : Muscicapidae**Subfamily : Timalinae**

158) Greyheaded parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis* AD; 159) Necklaced laughing thrush *Garrulax moniligerus*; 160) Blackgorgeted laughing

thrush *Garrulax pectoralis*; 161) Whitecrested laughing thrush *Garrulax leucolophus* Crimson winged laughing thrush *Garrulax phoeniceus* PS; 162) Silver eared mesia *Leiothrix argentauris*; 163) Yellownaped yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*; 164) Blackchinned yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta* AD; 165) Whitebellied yuhina *Yuhina zantholeuca*; 166) Nepal babbler *Alcippe nipalensis*; 167) Longtailed sibia *Heterophasia picacides*; 168) Abbott's babbler *Trichastoma abbotti*; 169) Spotted babbler *Phellorneum ruficeps* RA & SK; 170) Lesser scaly-breasted wren babbler *Phoebe pusilla*; 171) Black-throated babbler *Stachyris nigriceps*; 172) Yellow-breasted babbler *Macronous gularis*; 173) Tickell's babbler *Trichastoma tickelli* PS; 174) Marsh spotted babbler *Pellorneum palustre* PS; 175) Blue-winged siva *Minla cyanouroptera* PS; 176) Red-tailed minla *Minla ignotincta* PS; 177) Spectacled barwing *Actinodura egertoni* RA & SK

Subfamily Muscicapinae

178) Redbreasted flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*; 179) Little pied flycatcher *Muscicapa westermanni*; 180) Large niltava *Muscicapa grandis*; 181) Small niltava *Muscicapa macgrigoriae*; 182) Rufous-bellied niltava *Muscicapa sundara* AD; 183) Tickell's blue flycatcher *Muscicapa tickelliae*; 184) Verditer flycatcher *Muscicapa thalassina*; 185) Eastern slaty blue flycatcher *Muscicapa leucomelaneura minuta* PS; 186) Brown flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris* RA & SK; 187) Orange-gorgeted flycatcher *Muscicapa strophia*; 188) Rufous-breasted blue flycatcher *Muscicapa hyperythra* RA & SK; 189) Ferruginous flycatcher *Muscicapa ferruginea* PS; 190) Pygmy blue flycatcher *Muscicapa hodgsonii* RA & SK; 191) Greyheaded flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*; 192) Yellowbellied fantail flycatcher *Rhiphidura hypoxantha*; 193) Whitethroated fantail flycatcher *Rhiphidura albicollis*; 194) Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradis*; 195) Blacknaped flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea*

Subfamily Sylviinae

196) Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*; 197) Tickell's leaf warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*; 198) Yellow-browed leaf warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* PS; 199) Blackbrowed leaf warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*; 200) Slaty bellied ground warbler *Tesia olivea*; 201) Chestnut-headed flycatcher warbler *Tesia castaneocoronata*; 202) Chestnut-headed flycatcher warbler *Seicercus castaneiceps* 203) Allied flycatcher warbler *Seicercus affinis*; 204) Grey-headed flycatcher warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos* PS; 205) Broad-billed flycatcher warbler *Abroscopus hodgsoni* RA & SK; 206) Yellow-bellied flycatcher warbler *Abroscopus superciliosus* PS

Subfamily Turdinae

207) Himalayan rubythroat *Erithacus pectoralis* AD; 208) Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*; 209) Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*; 210) Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*; 211) Daurian redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*; 212) Guldenstadt's redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* PS; 213) Plumbeous redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*; 214) Blackbacked forktail *Enicurus immaculatus*; 215) Slatybacked forktail *Enicurus schistaceus*; 216) Leschenault's forktail *Enicurus leschenaulti*; 217) Little forktail *Enicurus scouleri* PS; 218) Collared

bush chat *Saxicola torquata*; 219) Dark grey bushchat *Saxicola ferrea*; 220) Whitecapped redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*; 221) Blue rock thrush *Monticola solitarius*; 222) Blue whistling thrush *Myiophonus caeruleus*; 223) Orangeheaded ground thrush *Zoothera citrina*; 224) Greywinged blackbird *Turdus boulboul*; 225) Lesser shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys* RA & SK; 226) Whitebrowed shortwing *Brachypteryx montana* RA & SK; 227) Whitetailed blue robin *Cinclidium leucurum* RA & SK; 228) Orange-flanked bush robin *Erithacus cyanurus* PS; 229) Rufous bellied bush robin *Erithacus hyperythrus* PS; 230) Green cochoa *Cochoa viridis*

Family : Cinclidae

231) Brown dipper *Cinclus pallasii*

Family : Paridae

232) Sultan tit *Melanochlora sultanea*; 233) Grey tit *Parus major* RA & SK; 234) Black spotted yellow tit *Parus spilonotus* RA & SK

Family : Sittidae

235) Chestnut-bellied nuthatch *Sitta castanea*; 236) Velvet fronted nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* RA & SK

Family : Motacillidae

237) Indian tree pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*; 238) Paddyfield pipit *Anthus rufulus* PS; 239) Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*; 240) Pied wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Family : Dicaeidae

241) Scarlet backed flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*; 242) Yellow-vented flowerpecker *Dicaeum chrysorrheum* PS; 243) Plaincolored flowerpecker *Dicaeum concolor* PS; 244) Fire breasted flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus* RA & SK

Family : Nectariniidae

245) Streaked spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*; 246) Little spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris* PS; 247) Blackbreasted sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*; 248) Nepal yellow backed sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis*; 249) Rubycheek *Anthreptes singalensis*; 250) Yellow backed sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja* PS

Family : Zosteropidae

251) White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*;

Family : Ploecidae

Subfamily Passerinae

252) House sparrow *Passer domesticus*; 253) Tree sparrow *Passer montanus* PS; 254) Whitebacked munia *Lonchura striata*

Family : Fringillidae

255) Scarlet finch *Haematospiza sipahi* AD

Family : Emberizidae

256) Crested bunting *Melophus lathami* AD; 257) Little bunting *Emberiza pusilla* PS





The end of August being the best season, a wildlife study tour of Kenyan game reserves was organised by the Bombay Natural History Society under the leadership of P.B. Shekar. The main focus was on African game animals, yet we saw plenty of birds during our visits to Masai Mara, Lake Nakuru, Amboseli and Tsao West National Parks.

Since many African birds are closely related to those of India, I thought this article may interest readers of the Newsletter.

Armed with Collin's Field Guide we set out for Masai Mara and enroute saw innumerable colonies of Buffalo weaver birds, their untidy nests hanging from low boughs. Our first sighting was the superb starling *Spreo superbus* similar to our common myna but with brilliant metallic blue green body, chestnut underparts with a white band, slaty grey bill. Also its cousin Hilderbrandt's starling *Spreo hilderbrandti* with its orange red eyes feeding on the ground. We noticed the ubiquitous anteater chat *Myrmecocichia aethiops* akin to our pied bush chat, glossy black all over with a white shoulder patch. In the dry thorn bush near the Sekenani gate we encountered the helmeted guinea fowl *Numida nitrata* with their conspicuous cobalt blue head and neck yellow bony crest and red and blue wattles. The graceful crowned crane *Balearica regulorum*, the size of demoiselle crane was cocking its head with its crown of stiff golden bristles shining in the sun. On the banks of the Talek river was a large marabou stork *Leptoptilus crumeniferus*, a scavenging bird very much like an abridged version of our adjutant stork. On reaching the riverside tented camp site we noticed flocks of yellow vented bulbuls *Pyronotus goiavia*, similar to our redvented species except for the yellow vent, perched on the wiremesh of the ramshackle dining hall, calling joyously.

On 27th August, we came across the fear-some looking secretary bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*, a characteristic bird of Africa striding through the savanna with its long heeled legs, making constant head movements and intently searching the grass for prey. A flock of masai ostriches *Struthio camelus*, the largest living birds, was strutting in the bushveld. The familiar grey herons *Ardea cinerea* and yellowbilled egrets *Mesophox intermedium* similar to our median egret had gathered near a stagnant pool while a lilac-breasted roller *Coracias caudata* resembling the Indian roller except for the colour flew overhead.

In our second ride we saw a flock of 20 helmeted guinea fowl scratching the ground for insects. In the grassland ahead, a group of hungry whitebacked vultures, were pecking fiercely at each other and tearing flesh from the carcass of a wild beast. On the last day we headed south for Mara river and enroute noticed a small group of crested francolin *Francolinus sephaena* very similar to our partridges. An eagle sent them scurrying and they quickly took cover under a bush. Around

Glimpses of Kenyan Birdlife

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Keekorok lodge, Hilderbrandt's francolin *Francolinus hilderbrandti* scampered at the approach of our Combi, the 8-seater van. There was a mixed group of male, female and baby hippos in the Mara river frolicking in the muddy water. African pied wagtails *Motacilla aguimp* similar to our large pied wagtails with white eye-brows but smaller in size were having a free ride on the floating islands of hippos. Redbilled oxpeckers or tickbirds *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* resembling the greyheaded myna but with pale ashy brown upper parts, bare facial area, red bill, blackish legs and yellow orbits like our common myna's were picking ticks and flies on the backs of hippos which were jostling for space on the river bank like oil tankers in a dockyard. While returning to camp we observed a group of four black-bellied Hartlaub's bustards *Lissotis melanogaster* akin to the lesser florican but with a short crest and prominent black belly in the male and a white belly in the female. Near the Naivasha Ebony factory were flocks of pied crows *Corvus albus* with their conspicuous white necks and throat.

Lake Nakuru National park was created in 1960 as a bird sanctuary. A flash of pink along the lake edge turned out to be the hundreds of thousands of lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* and greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. The firebirds of the Rift Valley had gathered in this shallow alkaline lake to harvest the abundant food supply of blue algae. A large flock of white pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* were foraging alongside the flamingos. According to the guide these birds have increased in number after introduction of alkaline tolerant fish *Talapia grahami* in the lake. Other waterbirds sighted were the familiar blackwinged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, greyheaded gull *Larus cirrocephalus* looking like brown-headed gulls in winter plumage, blacksmith plover *Hoplopterus armatus* very much like the little ringed plover but larger in size with black cheeks, throat, nape and breast, white forehead and crown and black spur on wing. The yellowbilled stork or wood ibis *Ibis ibis* had white plumage partly tinged with crimson, black flight feathers and tail, red head and yellow bill. The longtailed cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus* is the large cormorant while the cattle egret is the buffbacked heron *Ardeola ibis* and both were found in the company of grey herons. Grey rumped swallows *Hirundo griseopyga* akin to redrumped swallows were making crisscross flights overhead while the augur buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus* was gliding effortlessly. Among the sedges and reeds we spotted a male Egyptian goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus* with white wing coverts, black primaries, green secondaries, chestnut patch round eyes and a ring round the neck foraging. Red-billed oxpeckers were riding on the back of common waterbucks and white rhinos in the grassland.

In Amboseli a mixed flock of superb starlings including a few immature ones with dusky eyes and Hilderbrandt's starlings had descended on our breakfast table to partake of

bread crumbs. They were later joined by whiteheaded buffalo weaver birds *Dinemellia dinamelli* and redbilled buffalo weaver birds *Bubalomis niger* slightly larger than baya weaver bird. There was a solitary D'arnaud's barbet *Trachyphonus darnaudin* with prominent white and yellow spots. In the first game ride a group of yellownecked spurfowl! *Francoelinus leucoscepus*, masai ostriches and crowned cranes were sighted. Amidst the large swamp, cattle egrets were riding on elephant back while grey herons, long-tailed cormorants and sacred ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* similar to white ibis but with iridescent green tipped flight feathers were seeking food. African jacana or lily trotter *Actophilornis africana* looking more like the non-breeding pheasant-tailed jacana but with chestnut brown body, wings, tail, white neck front and golden yellow upper breast was busy among the water lilies while the African black crane *Limnocolaptes flavirostris* having the profile of our brown crane, with black body, greenish-yellow bill, flirting its tail like moorhen was hurriedly crossing the reed beds. Blacksmith plovers were flying low over the swamp. In the Acacia woodland a greenwood hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus*, a glossed green and violet bird with a red bill and white-tipped long tail was seen. In the low bush near our tent we saw for the first time a pair of speckled mouse bird *Colis striatus*, a drab coloured endemic bird of Africa. The guide explained that its habit of creeping along the branches like a mouse earned its name. In Enkongu Narok swamp were flocks of lesser and greater flamingos, white pelicans, cattle egrets and sacred ibis. On our way back to the camp we recorded a pair of dignified kori bustards *Ardeotis kori* with mottled black and white crown tapering to crest and white "eye brows". While savouring the aromatic Kenyan coffee in the shack we noticed a bird alighting on a huge tree branch. Focussing our binoculars we could see its black beak, pale grey back, head, crest, chest and pure white belly. It was identified as a male white-bellied go-away-bird *Corythaixoides leucogaster*, a typical African bird. According to the guide its call is harsh sheep-like bleat "go-away" and hence its name. We also

spotted the white-browed coucal *Centropus superciliosus* similar to lesser coucal but with different plumage colouration.

The last leg of our journey was to Tsavi West. Around Kulagani lodge were redbilled hornbills *Tockus erythrorhynchus* with white spots on wing coverts hopping from one branch to another. In the vicinity of Tsavo river we came across yellowbilled hornbills *Tockus flavirostris* and a pair of Egyptian goose. By dusk we reached Ziواني Tented Camp in the heart of the jungle. Over-looking the Thende waterhole, this camp is best located for game viewing. While sipping tea, one can view in the comfort of a chair hippos, crocodiles and other game animals a few metres away. A surprise announcement of a night safari thrilled us. We drove into the adjoining jungle to see the night life. Besides big game we saw thick-knee or spotted stone curlew *Burhinus capensis* closely resembling the stone curlew gazing at the search light while a dusky night jar *Caprimulgus fraenatus* was lying huddled on ground.

Next morning we went bird watching accompanied by an experienced guide. Among the extensive sedges and reeds of the waterhole we sighted the hadada ibis *Hagedashia hagedash* having the general profile of glossy ibis but with olive-grey head, neck and underparts, iridescent green showing on back and rounded wings in good light. Other birds recorded were the African jacana, African black crane, African pied wagtail, marabou stork and Egyptian geese with gooselets. In the proximity of the camp we came across the greyheaded social weaver bird *Philetairus socius* and goldenbacked or Jackson's weaver bird *Ploceus jacksoni*. Along the bank of the watercourse we saw grey herons, lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*, crowned plover *Vanellus coronatus*, great white egret *Casmerodius albus* resembling large egret, hammerkop *Scopus umbretta* with its characteristic hammerhead silhouette, greyheaded kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephalis*, pigmy kingfisher *Ispidina picta* and the Tsao purple-banded sunbird *Nectarinia tsavoensis* similar to our purple sunbird. It was time to go and John, the driver reminded us of the long journey back to Nairobi.



At home with the spotted munias

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It was on the 29th August 98, at about 5 p.m., that my grand daughter Patricia drew my attention to a pair of spotted munias *Lonchura punctulata* perched a foot apart on an overhead electric wire above our main gate. The two of them were gazing down on a pair of weeping Ashoka trees *Polyalthia longifolia* var. *pendula* in our front garden. After a couple of minutes or so, the pair indulged in a series of dulcet notes and faced each other as if in conversation. Then one of the pair flew down onto the smaller of the two trees and made a series of nods to the right, left, above and below, as if to ensure that its actions were not being watched by some intruder. It then decided to spring to the larger tree alongside and made a hasty entrance into the heavy foliage. After a few

moments this investigating bird uttered a train of soft bi-syllabic whistling notes, not unlike *t-sit t-sit.....*, to which the partner on the overhead electric wire responded by flying down onto the smaller tree alongside the one in which the mate was hidden by the foliage. In a very short while the confined bird let out a soft sounding call to which the partner responded by leaping onto and then entering the foliage that ensconced the caller. After what seemed like a couple of minutes, the pair of spotted munias emerged from the leafage and flew away to a spot in my neighbour's garden. Having watched the behaviour of this pair of spotted munias my suspicions were aroused, in that the two were seeking out a place to build their nest; and I told my grand daughter that the

following day may well confirm my surmise that the pair were looking for a suitable nesting site.

Next morning at about 08.00 hrs, the 30th Aug'98, my suspicions were confirmed, for the pair of spotted munias were now very busily engaged in the task of nest building. They were flying in with great speed and haste with lengths of approx. 1/3 metre or so of somewhat dry tubular stalks of grass with attached blades trailing from their beaks. This hectic nest building activity kindled my imagination and thus gave me the urge to carry out a time and motion study on their endeavours. So with the aid of my wife Cynthia and grand daughter Patricia, I got down to the task of recording the frequency and timings of their visit to the nesting site and arrived at the following. The birds flew in at almost regular intervals of 2 minutes each, with a minute separating their coming to and going away from the site of nesting. During each visit the individual bird remained inside the leafage for a period ranging from 10 to 12 seconds. This activity remained the norm for the entire period of the days spent by the pair for nest building. On a very conservative estimate, each bird made 30 visits per hour to the site; thus making a combined total of 60 trips per hour. On this day alone, the 30th Aug'98, the pair had laboured for 7 hours 18 minutes and carried a cumulative length of 144.54 metres of grass.

On the 31st Aug'98, the pair turned up at 07.10 hours and spent a total of 7 hrs 48 mins in nest building activity, employing the same time period of 2 minutes per trip to and fro to the site, with a minute separating their coming to and going away from the site, and the 10 to 12 seconds each bird spent inside the foliage attending to the construction of the nest, but with a slight change in the material employed, which were long blades of fresh grass in similar lengths of 1/3 metre, thus making a running length of 154.44 metres.

On the 1st Sep'98, the pair turned up rather late and laboured for only 3 hrs 18 mins (from 13.05 to 14.38 hrs and then again from 15.00 to 16.45 hrs), and utilised broad flat blades of fresh green grass in lengths of approx. 1/3 metre. Thus a total running length of 65.34 metres of grass was employed by the pair of spotted munia.

On the 2nd Sep'98, the pair resumed their nesting activity from 11.25 to 12.55 hrs and then again from 14.45 to 16.30 hrs (a total of 3 hrs 15 mins), but this time they brought in tubular stalks of grass with withered leaves in the usual lengths of approx. 1/3 metre; thus totalling 64.35 metres in running length.

On the 3rd Sep'98, the pair spent 1 hr 40 mins in building activity and utilised a total of 33.00 metres of dry stalks of grass. The pair were not to be seen after completing their work (which lasted from 10.23 to 12.03 hrs) until about 6 p.m. when they returned and entered the foliage in the weeping Ashoka tree to settle down for the night.

On the 4th Sep'98, the pair were conspicuous by their absence until they showed up at around 6.15 p.m. and settled down in the nest for the night.

The weeping Ashoka tree in which the nest is built is three years old and stands 5 metres high. The nest is located at a height of roughly 3 metres, but due to the long slender drooping branches with heavy leafage the nest is not visible to the naked eye, except by pushing aside a few of the slender branches and peeping through the inner openings. This I did on the very first day of nest building, when the birds were away, in order to ascertain the height of the nest, but desisted from further intrusions so as not to disturb their tranquillity and wellbeing.

The spotted munias had spent a total of 23 hrs 19 mins in labour, and carried a total running length of approx. 461.67 metres of grasses of sorts in the 1399 trips they undertook during the nest building. Verily an amazing feat of endurance and tenacity for so small a bird as the spotted munia.

In view of the confined nature of the nest and the aversion I have to disturb the birds in any way, I now look forward to the arrival of the chicks in the hope of listening in to their plaintive calls for food, and to the moment when they emerge from the foliage to take wing.



Sighting of a rare species of bird at Thiruvananthapuram

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I participated in the bird survey conducted by *Warblers and Waders* in the Wyanad wildlife sanctuary in December 1996. I returned home on 27th December, after the week long survey, and on the very next day, an unusual bird was observed in the backyard of my residence at Barton Hill, Thiruvananthapuram.

My house stands in the middle of a compound measuring 8.08 Acre. There are a few wild trees in the compound : coralwood *Adenanthera pavonina*, Indian coral tree *Erythrina indica*, Vatta *Macaranga roxburghii*, Vengai *Bridelia squamosa*, Margossa *Azadirachta indica* and also jack tree *Artocarpus heterophyllus*. Even though the area has been fragmented into tiny residential blocks with the rapid growth

of the city, three adjoining plots belonging to Dr. Kurien Chandy, Mr. Pereira and this writer have escaped this general trend. It remains vegetated and a good habitat for birds.

As stated above the bird was first sighted in the backyard of this house on 28 Dec. 1996. Thereafter it was seen almost regularly, except for three or four days. It was always seen single.

The bird was akin to the Indian blue chat, but slightly larger. At first sight it was presumed to be an Indian pitta but its characteristic greenish colouration was totally absent (Pitta had been sighted and recorded in this compound in the winter of 1968 and 1983)

The sighting was first reported by Rohith at the monthly meeting of *Warblers and Waders* on 4 January 1997. With the help of C. Susanthkumar, Co-ordinator, *Warblers and Waders*, the species was conclusively identified as Orangeheaded ground thrush *Zoothera citrina*.

The head, neck and chest are dull orange, while the wings are smoky blue in colour. There is a white patch on the greater wing coverts which is visible while resting. The tail is short and wedge-shaped and its ventral side is white. There are white under tail coverts also. The beak is sturdy and brownish black. The legs are pale yellow. The tarsus is very slender and slightly elongated which looks like continuation of an almost straight shank. The shank is covered thickly with white tiny plumes. There is a white spot on the lower belly at the point where the shanks meet the body.

The bird was seen hopping about on the ground under the trees. It feeds on tiny worms, ant lions, termites, maggots, spiders, grubs etc usually by upturning dead leaves. It takes to the lower branches of small trees when disturbed. When the disturbance ends it returns to the ground. It is seen actively searching for its prey in the mornings by even resorting to fast runs whereas in the evenings it is less active. It is greatly inclined to perch on tree stumps which are hardly a foot in height or on granites strewn on the ground, especially in the evenings. It continues to sit motionless up to thirty minutes at a stretch or until a worm attracts it.

During the month of January, it used to roost by about 6.00 p.m. By the middle of March the roosting was at late as 6.40 p.m. Before roosting it drank water from an earthen pot kept under the trees, cleansed its beak by rubbing against a twig and flew to different trees in increasing height and finally roosted in the jack tree. The branch selected was about 24 feet from the ground. On some other days it roosted on another jack tree in a neighbouring plot.

On subsequent mornings, it was again observed on the ground vigorously engaged in feeding. In the month of January it was seen spending the whole day in the same plot, but in early March it was seen only in early mornings and evenings. In between it must have been in neighbouring villas.

Amazingly the bird did not chirp even once until the third week of March. But on 20th March 1997, it got a companion, a whitethroated ground thrush. In the evening just before roosting it made a harsh alarm-like screech with regular pauses in between. It again chirped on subsequent evenings. One book states its call as

"a peculiar loud whistle, something like the screeching of a slate pencil a pleasant song".

The whitethroated ground thrush was again observed on 23rd March at about 11.00 am for 30-35 minutes. Then there was a small duel between them and the whitethroated ground thrush flew away.

The orangeheaded ground thrush is a rare bird as far as the state of Kerala is concerned. Shri K.K. Neelakantan has not included it in his Magnum Opus, *Keralathile Pakshikal*² (Birds of Kerala) whereas he has mentioned about another subspecies, whitethroated ground thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*. Dr. Salim Ali has also not mentioned this species in the "Birds of Travancore"³. It is obvious that this is a rare visitor to this State. Dr. Salim Ali states "it winters in the subcontinent locally; Sri Lanka; Andaman and Nicobar Is"⁴.

The only two references I have on this bird having been sighted earlier are from my friend, Shri C. Susanthkumar, who has observed it twice in the backyard of his residence at Indira Nagar, Thiruvananthapuram in 1985⁵. On March 20, 1986 he had again observed a pair of orangeheaded ground thrush at Kallar Valley, 45 km east of Thiruvananthapuram in the foothills of Western Ghats. He states "It was early in the afternoon (March 1986). But the rain forest in the Kallar Valley was dark and gloomy. The forest was silent Luck seemed to have favoured me that day. As I turned a corner, I noticed two orangeheaded ground thrushes feeding in the narrow path. It is one of the rarest winter visitors of Kerala"⁶. However the bird finds a place in the Book of Kerala Birds⁷. It is also included in the field guide, "Important birds of Periyar"⁸. A Field Guide to Birds of South East Asia gives its range from West Pakistan to S. China, Hainan, Andamans, Nicobars, Greater Sundas⁹.

The bird is observed in Thiruvananthapuram for the first time in a decade. It is noteworthy that of the three recorded sightings of this bird since 1985, two are from the heart of the city, obviously revealing the birds inclination for a metropolitan habitat.

The sighting has been reported in the Nature View Newsletter¹⁰. Being a rare visitor there was a constant flow of bird watchers to observe it. Apart from C. Susanthkumar, M. Ramesh, S. Rajeevan, K. A. Kishore, R. Jayaprakash, K. Rafeek, Neetha, Babu P. Ramesh et al of *Warblers and Waders* have observed it and studied the habits. M. Ramesh has succeeded in photographing this rare visitor which was also published in the Nature View Newsletter.

The exact habits of the bird, especially its migratory trends, have to be closely observed and studied. The bird was last observed on 3rd April 1997.

In the 1997-98 season also the bird did land on this particular spot, on 16 Dec. 1997. It spent the whole day in the plot, but it resumed its southward journey thereafter probably to its destination in Jaffna (?) It was not spotted thereafter.

I thank C. Susanthkumar for his consistent encouragement in observing and recording the habits of the bird and M. Ramesh for painstakingly photographing it. I also thank K. Rafeek for the constant encouragement given by him for preparing this report for publication in the Newsletter.

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Unexplored Wetland Of Uttar Pradesh

MOHD. ZAFAR-UL ISLAM, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House,
S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023

Uttar Pradesh is very rich as far as wetlands are concerned. Some are remarkable for their floral and faunal diversity. One of them is "Rati Ka Nagla (RKN)".

Location

Rati-ka-Nagla wetland is about 400 acres, 13 kms from the Sikandra Rao Tehsil of Aligarh district, and 55 kms east of Aligarh city. It is perennial and receives water from rain and also from small canals. Fortunately Water Hyacinth *Eichornia crassipes* is present only in a small part of the wetland.

In the last week of February 1997 when winter was blinking its eyes and ready to say good bye and inviting the scorching summer to help wheat to ripen, we started our excursion to Patna Bird Sanctuary. This team consisted of eminent ornithologist Dr Asad R. Rahmani and other students of Centre of Wildlife, AMU, Aligarh. We enjoyed immensely the bird sanctuary where we saw thousands of birds. In the last week of February 1997 on the way back from Patna Bird Sanctuary to Aligarh, we were watching hundreds of birds flying to neighbouring wetlands. We decided to investigate and followed the flight of the birds. After about 10 km we came to a flat area which apparently was covered with vegetation. A flock of ducks appeared and settled about 500 m away. When we searched thoroughly, we found that we were standing near a huge wetland with thick growth of emergent and floating vegetation. I climbed on the top of the vehicle and saw that further up, the water surface was free from vegetation but it was covered with an immense number of ducks. We decided to return to Aligarh.

After a week we again went to explore Rati ka Nagla. We reached there by noon. We were surprised to see how beautiful it was! The whole jheel was full of birds, however less in number compared to the last visit one week back because the majority of birds had started flying back to their breeding areas. We felt that it could be an ideal foraging habitat for the Siberian crane.

In the evening we saw flocks and flocks of Sarus crane *Grus antigone* coming to the jheel for roosting. We counted nearly 115 Sarus. I have never seen such a congregation of Sarus in my life. Another interesting observation was a roost of about 75 harriers on the ground.

Conservation

The villages surrounding Rati-ka-Nagla are dominated by Thakurs, Yadavs and Gujars. They regularly hunt birds and other small animals. While we were observing birds, we saw poachers at the far corner of the jheel. The wetland is surrounded by waste land locally known as "Usar", but villagers have started converting Usar into crop fields. Since British days the Jheel has been a haven for hunters, but now it must be conserved in the interest of wildlife and humanity alike.

Checklist of birds of Rati-ka-Nagla (Jheel) and its surrounding areas

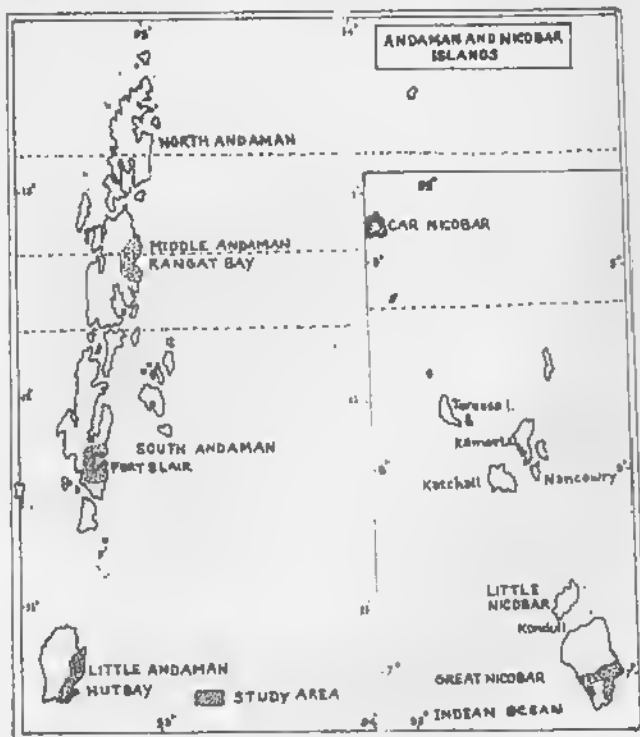
- 1) Little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis*; (2) Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*; (3) Darter *Anhinga rufa*; (4) Grey heron *Ardea cinerea*; (5) Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*; (6) Large egret *Ardea alba*; (7) Smaller egret *Egretta intermedia*; (8) Little egret *Egretta garzetta*; (9) Painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala*; (10) Openbill stork *Anastomus oscians*; (11) Whitenecked stork *Ciconia episcopus*; (12) Blacknecked stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*; (13) White ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica*; (15) Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*; (16) Greylag goose *Anser anser*; (17) Barheaded goose *Anser indicus*; (18) Ruddy shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*; (19) Pintail *Anas acuta*; (20) Common teal *Anas crecca*; (21) Spotbilled duck *Anas peocilorhyncha*; (22) Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*; (23) Wigeon *Anas penelope*; (24) Garganey *Anas querquedula*; (25) Shoveler *Anas clypeata*; (26) Redcrested pochard *Netta rufina*; (27) Cotton teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*; (28) Comb duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*; (29) Pariah kite *Milvus migrans govinda*; (30) Whitebacked vulture *Gyps bengalensis*; (31) Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus*; (32) Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus*; (33) Sarus crane *Grus antigone*; (34) Whitebreasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*; (35) Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*; (36) Coot *Fulica atra*; (37) Redwattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*; (38) Redshank *Tringa totanus*; (39) Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*; (40) Ruff & reeve *Philomachus pugnax*; (41) Indian river tern *Sterna aurantia*; (42) Crow-pheasant *Centropus sinensis*; (43) Pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*; (44) Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*; (45) Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*; (46) Crested lark *Galerida cristata*; (47) Wiretailed swallow *Hirundo smithii*; (48) Grey shrike *Lanius excubitor*; (49) Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*; (50) Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*; (51) Bank myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*; (52) House crow *Corvus splendens*; (53) Stone chat *Saxicola torquata*; (54) Pied bushchat *Saxicola caprata*; (55) Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*; (56) House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

ABSTRACT

BIRDING IN THE ANDAMANS. PROF. A. RELTON, Staff Advisor, Nature Club, Bishop Hebbur College, Trichy 620 017, Tamil Nadu

Professor Relton spent six weeks in the Andamans (and recorded 111 species of birds including 26 endemics. He says that 242 species and subspecies are reported of which 95 species (39.5% are endemics). The dangers of introducing species into the islands are well known, yet the following birds have been introduced — the house sparrow, common myna, grey partridge, pea fowl.

There are 15 wildlife sanctuaries and national parks in the Andamans covering an area of 640 sq kms (18% of the land surface). The author emphasises the following conservation problems.



- Rich forests are still being clear felled.
- Many Nicobaris are now using air guns Most of the birds they shoot are endemics including rare birds such as pigeons, doves and megapodes.
- Trade in wildlife continues with South East Asian countries. Parakeets and hill mynas are exported in large numbers.
- Since tribals have special rights in protected areas, people on the mainland use these loopholes to engage in illegal trade in wildlife.

- An impressive list of references is given which is reproduced here.

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NEST MAKING AND BREEDING OF THE PURPLE RUMPED SUNBIRDS. DR. SATISH A. PANDE, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune-9

The author has done a remarkable job in observing the nest making of a pair of purplerumped sunbirds in his garden in Pune.

In the last week of March 1997, "in 8 days the typical pear shaped suspended nest made of twigs, dry grass blades, cobwebs, spider droppings, threads, plastic, paper and hair, with the classical portico was completed. The inner lining was of white soft cotton. The male was definitely seen assisting the female. With the daylight span of 12.5 hours an average of 65-70 visits were made to the nest in a day ... 2 eggs were laid over 24 hours. During her brief absence from the nest, the

male kept vigil from an overhanging branch but was never seen incubating.

During a storm the nest collapsed and one of the chicks fell off. Dr. Pande repaired the nest and replaced the chick not in the original nest but on a support created near the nest. It was observed that the injured (chick) was continually pushed out by (the other). The author has supplied the following information about his observations.

1. Nesting period of purplerumped sunbirds is variable. The present nesting was in April-May. I have seen nesting in October in the same locality.
2. The usual clutch is of two/three.
3. Nests are subject to damage from unseasonal rain.
4. Parents accept nest repair with cloth.
5. If one sib is in the nest and the other in an artificial nest, the latter is not fed.
6. Only if the original nest is broken, the replaced sibs in the alternative nest, close to the original nest, are fed by the parents.
7. I have once observed that before the hatching of the eggs a purple rumped sunbirds' nest was destroyed by rain and the eggs broke. The pair quickly rebuilt a nest on an adjacent tree and successfully reared a new clutch of three.
8. The females of the purple rumped sunbird have a red iris, while those of a purple sunbird have a brown iris.
9. Injured sibs are neglected by the family.



UNUSUAL TAIL PATTERN OF BRONZED DRONGO (*DICURUS AENEUS*) R. SHYAMA PRASAD RAO, Biosciences Dept., Mangalore University, Konaje 574 199

The author says that on 5th Jan 1988 he saw a bronzed drongo "with a pentaigitate fan like feathers instead of (the) usual blunt forked tail feathers". V. Santharam comments that the 'forked' appearance is often lost during the moulting. Moulting involves extra energy. The timing of the moult "is done when food is available in abundance". Hence the timing depends partly on food availability.



CORRESPONDENCE

GREY BABBLER ATTACKING ITS REFLECTION. J.L. SINGH, D-3/1, Rites Flats, Ashok Vihar (Phase 3), New Delhi 110 052

In the late 70s, I was posted in Bhavnagar and was allotted one of the old colonial-style bungalows to live in. The building was a rambling affair with a broad and wide verandah

all around. Near the main entrance was a mirror, which most such bungalows had in the era they were built.

The compound in which the bungalow stood had both a kitchen as well as a flower garden. Bird life was thus ubiquitous and abundant. Almost from the first day that I moved into this bungalow, I noticed that a grey babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*) regularly approached the mirror and fought with its own reflection. There was a small ledge in front of the mirror on which the babbler stood and pecked at its reflection quite vigorously. I had no way of knowing if it was the same bird or if a new one continued the struggle day after day. I was in this bungalow for roughly a year and my estimate is that the babbler must have had its fight at least 60-70% of the days.

The interesting thing is that there were many other birds in the area, a large number of which came into the verandah. No other species indulged in this behavior. At other times I have seen house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) displaying similar activity but not in Bhavnagar.

I forgot about this till recently. I am now posted in Delhi and about a month back was taking a walk in one of Delhi's many gardens. On the fringe of a garden in Ashok Vihar in the North of the city, was a parked scooter. As I walked past the scooter, I noticed that a grey babbler was busy fighting itself in the rear view mirror of the scooter. Since there was no ledge in front of this mirror, the bird was having difficulty balancing itself on the shaft on which the mirror was fixed. But without much ado, the babbler was fighting itself with abandon.

I may have overlooked this but on two more occasions in the same scooter stand, I have seen a grey babbler fighting its reflection. The area has Jungle babblers (*T. striatus*) also, perhaps in greater numbers, but the fight is only by the grey babbler.



KOEL BOOM AT JODHPUR. ISHWAR PRAKASH, Desert Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Jodhpur 342 009

Urbanisation is usually considered a major factor for the shrinkage of biodiversity in a region. My observations during the last fortysix years in the desert city of Jodhpur prove to be an exception to this concept.

When I moved in Jodhpur during 1952, it was spread hardly over five square kilometers. Water was a scarce commodity. The vegetation within the town was mostly *khejri*, *Prosopis spicigera* and the *vilayati bobool*, *Prosopis juliflora*. The sand dunes in the southeastern fringes were studded with *bordi*, *Ziziphus nummularia* and *bekaria*, *Tephrosia purpurea*. The rocks in the west were full of *thor*, *Euphorbia caducifolia* and a herb, *goondi*, *Cordia gharaf*. Accordingly, the avian fauna was mostly deserticolous : doves, pigeons, abundant

crows, kites and lots of vultures. On the outskirts larks, wheatears, common myna and babblers were commonly found. During the monsoon, we rarely used to hear Koel's music and it used to be a big attraction to children as well as the adults.

During the last four and half decades, Jodhpur city has spread over more than 20 kilometers, all sand dunes have been levelled, the adjoining hillocks have turned into greenery though a large number of buildings have been constructed over them. Along with this expansion, three eco-friendly efforts occurred. Drinking water was made available through a canal from Jawai dam, about 175 kms down south in the Aravalli range. Secondly, the Jodhpur municipality formulated rules to construct houses only on about 60% per cent of the plot size. Thirdly, the Central Arid Zone Research Institute distributed trees (mostly neem) and ornamental plants (bougainvillea) free of charge. Because of available free space, the people took to their hearts to grow neem trees and ornamental plants in their compounds. As a consequence the desert city has now changed to a well vegetated city with a large number of trees. With the revegetation of the town the first to appear was crow pheasant, then the golden oriole and during the last three years, the koel population has enhanced so much that their *Kuhu-kuhu* sometimes turn into intolerable cacophony. We conducted a reconnaissance survey of the expanded city and found that 4-6 koels are inhabiting every colony, usually roosting on neem trees as permanent residents. However, the crow population has noticeably gone down.

Urbanisation, if carried out in an eco-friendly manner, can be a boon to bird life in a city.



BLACK BULBULS ASSOCIATION WITH MELIA AZEDARACH. M.L. NARANG and R.S. RANA, AINP on Agricultural Ornithology, University of Horticulture & Forestry, Solan (H.P.).

This is in response to Dr. S. Thirumurthi and C.P. Banumathi's observations on *Melia azedarach* tree which they describe as keystone species for frugivorous birds in H.P., *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 38(4), July/Aug 1998.

We have been working on bird-tree association in this university campus for the last five years and have made a detailed study of birds interacting with trees/shrubs for fruits and nectars. *Melia azedarach* a common tree in the mid-hills of H.P. produces fruits which ripen during winter. Flocks of black bulbuls descend on these trees during winter and feed on *Melia* fruits from dawn to dusk. But it is not correct to state that no other wild fruit is available for frugivores during winter. Even black bulbuls have been recorded to feed on fruits/berries of *Ehretia accuminata*, *Rosa muschata*, and *Celtis australis* during the month of January although these birds prefer to feed on fruits of *Melia* during the months of

December-February when these fruits are available in plenty. When the fruits on the trees are finished, black bulbuls descend on the ground beneath the trees of *Melia* and feed on fallen fruits. But apart from occasional foraging by Himalayan bulbuls, no other avian frugivore has been recorded to feed on fruits of *Melia* during our five years of observations. So *Melia azedarach* could in no way be described as a 'keystone' species as described by the authors. Though wild fruits like *Bauhinia variegata*, *Celtis australis*, *Rosa muschata* and *Ehretia accuminata* are available to avian frugivores during winter the status of 'keystone' species could be given to *Celtis australis* which sustains nine species of avian frugivores during winter months as has already been reported by us at Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress and XII Birdslife Asia Conference held at Coimbatore in Nov., 1966 (Abstract P.52). The avian species recorded feeding on fruits of *Celtis australis* are : (in order of relative abundance)

(1) Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*; (2) Himalayan bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*; (3) Grey treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*; (4) Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*; (5) Rufous treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*; (6) Plum-headed parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*; (7) Bluethroated barbet *Megalaima asiatica*; (8) Black bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*; (9) Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

The detailed study has already been submitted for publication.



SAVE THE HERONRY AT MATHIKERE. DR. J.C. UTTANGI, Convener, Dharwad Bird Club, 36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 580 001

It is shocking to hear that the age old *Ficus* tree standing in front of the bus-stand at Mathikere about 70 km from Bangalore may be axed down because of the proposed Mysore Highway. This huge tree has been serving many waterfowl species like the grey heron, little cormorant and night heron as a heronry to nest and breed. On February 2nd 1997, a visit to this heronry was made by a group of birdwatchers from Dharwad, Hubli and Haveri towns. It was a spectacular sight to watch the Grey herons pairing. There were 40 pairs of grey herons, 20 pairs of little cormorants and 10-15 pairs of night herons. Grey herons are diminishing and it would be a folly to cut this tree.

[Citizens of Bangalore and Mysore recall with sadness the large scale slaughter of the *Ficus* and *Banyan* trees on the Hosur road when the highway was built a few years ago. A representation is being made to the Public Works Department that during the construction of the Highway from Bangalore to Mysore some of the more spectacular and ecologically valuable trees should not be destroyed. In this connection, the

letter from J.C. Uttangi is welcome and other readers of the Newsletter are requested to write if they are aware of any trees that need to be saved].

Editor

SPOTTED BILLED PELICAN IN JAKKUR LAKE, BANGALORE. GEORGE VERGHESE, *Centre for Environment and Education, Infantry Road, Bangalore 560001*

I am a regular visitor to the Jakkur area as part of my research sampling on dung beetles. For the past two years, I have been visiting Jakkur lake area and seen many common water birds. These include pond herons, cattle egrets, little egrets, little grebes, coots and whitebreasted and pied kingfishers. I have at times seen grey herons and blackwinged stilts.

Of late Jakkur lake's water level has gone up due to heavy monsoon showers. It was 8th September 1998 around 10.30 am as I and my assistant proceeded towards the lake for sampling, scores of coots, little grebes and some egrets could be spotted here and there. However, I was taken aback, by the presence of a single huge whitish bird, swimming gracefully at one end of the lake. At the first sight itself, I knew it was a pelican!! I slowly moved towards it and in no time I knew it was the spotted billed pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) with typical spots beneath its beak.

This was the first time, I have seen one during my two years of visits to Jakkur lake. After sometime, it quietly took off towards Yelahanka leaving me wondering whether it was a "Lost wanderer".

LARGE CLUTCH SIZE IN GREY FRANCOLIN (*FRANCOLINUS PONDICERIANUS*). J.K. TIWARI, *Assistant Manager (Wildlife and Environment), Nature Conservation Centre, Sanghi Industries Ltd. (Cement Division), Sanghipuram, Motiber, Abdasa, Kutch, Gujarat 370 655*

The grey francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* is a common and widely distributed species in Kutch. My studies in Kutch with the BNHS projects over six years in the Banni grasslands and other areas indicate that the grey francolin numbers have increased with the spread in the cover of the exotic weed "Prosopis juliflora".

The nests of grey francolins are concealed inside clumps of grass. The nesting season is generally before the monsoon. On 8th May 1998 I came across a nest of the grey francolin. The nest was in a tussock of grass well concealed. There were 11 eggs in the nest. I have never seen such a big clutch of

grey francolins. Another nest in the Nature Conservation Centre had seven eggs. The biggest clutch (but how many eggs? Editor) so far reported was by Eates(?) (Unpublished manuscript notes) seen in Sind, Pakistan (T.J. Roberts 1991), *The Birds of Pakistan*, pp 232-233.

DARTERS & LITTLE EGRETS NESTING IN GUDAVI BIRD SANCTUARY. GURUNATH DESAI, *Civil Engineer & Contractor, 31, Ashok Nagar, Hubli 580 032*

On 9th August 1998, 25 members of the YHAI, Dharwad Chapter were on a bird watching visit to Gudavi Bird Sanctuary (GBS) situated in Shimoga district (Karnataka). The sanctuary spreads over 182 acres with a large lake in its centre. Deciduous forests, grasslands, marshes, paddy and pineapple fields surround the sanctuary.

Having reached Gudavi at 12.30 pm, we were in for a surprise. There were literally hundreds of darters nesting. I am told that darters are getting endangered and so seeing such a large flock at Gudavi was indeed a pleasure. Over 2000 + white ibises were also nesting, and semifinished ibis nests were in the process of completion.

Another surprise was the presence of well over 1000 nests of little egrets.

The other birds seen were little cormorants (2000); Indian shag (300); night heron (100); pond herons (50); large egrets (10); coots (50); bronze-winged jacana (2); purple moorhen (2).

According to Salim Ali darters, little egrets and white ibises, breed in November to February in South India, where as all these birds were nesting at Gudavi in the month of August.

My sincere thanks to Shri S.G. Neginhal for his guidance.

ASIAN ANATIDAE ATLAS. ASAD R. RAHMANI, *Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra*

The Wetlands International is planning a publication of a preliminary inventory of habitat of international importance for Anatidae (ducks, geese and swans) in the form of Asian Anatidae Atlas. It will complement the Wetlands International's (WI) publication of *Atlas of Anatidae Populations of Africa and Western Eurasia*, which covers some common species and populations. Two basic criteria are used to identify internationally important sites > 20,000 individuals of Anatidae supported, and > 1% of a population

of more than one Anatidae species supported. These criteria are compatible with the Ramsar criteria for identification of wetlands of international importance.

The Wetlands International has identified BHNS to collect, collate and analyse information from India. The time schedule is very tight. In order to achieve this target, we seek your co-operation. Information is needed to identify key sites for each species throughout its range and we seek the following :

Name of the site:

Coordinates of centre of the site;

Protected status of the site; protected/partially protected/not protected/unknown;

Population size/estimate the site supported; number, date/month/year, published or unpublished reference(s).

All persons providing information for the preparation of the publication will be duly acknowledged and will receive a complimentary copy of the publication.

For India, information on the following species is required:

1) Siberian redbreasted goose *Branta ruficollis*; 2) Bean goose *Anser fabalis*; 3) Whitefronted goose *Anser albifrons*; 4) Lesser whitefronted goose *Anser erythropus*; 5) Greyleg goose *Anser anser*; 6) Barheaded goose *Anser indicus*; 7) Bewick's swan *Cygnus bewickii*; 8) Whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus*; 9) Mute swan *Cygnus olor*; 10) Lesser whistling teal *Dendrocygna javanica*; 11) Large whistling teal *Dendrocygna bicolor*; 12) Ruddy shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*; 13) Common shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*; 14) Marbled teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*; 15) Pintail *Anas acuta*; 16) Common teal *Anas crecca*; 17) Baikal teal *Anas formosa*; 18) Grey teal *Anas gibberifrons*; 19) Spotbill duck *Anas poecilorhynchos*; 20) Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*; 21) Gadwal *Anas strepera*; 22) Falcated teal *Anas falcata*; 23) Wigeon *Anas penelope*; 24) Garganey *Anas querquedula*; 25) Shoveller *Anas clypeata*; 26) Redcrested pochard *Netta rufina*; 27) Common pochard *Aythya ferina*; 28) White-eyed pochard *Aythya nyroca*; 29) Baer's pochard *Aythya baeri*; 30) Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*; 31) Scaup duck *Aythya marila*; 32) Cotton teal or quacky duck *Nettapus coromandelianus*; 33) Comb duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*; 34) Whitewinged wood duck *Cairina scutulata*; 35) Longtailed or old squaw duck *Clangula hyemalis*; 36) Goldeneye duck *Bucephala clangula*; 37) Smew *Mergus albellus*; 38) Goosander, common merganser *Mergus merganser*; 39) Whiteheaded stifftailed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*



COSTLY GEESE : \$ 5.3 MILLION AT J.F. KENNEDY AIRPORT. Courtesy, *International Herald Tribune of 11.11.1998*

The agency that operates John F. Kennedy International Airport will pay Air France \$ 5.3 million to settle a lawsuit over

damage done to a Concorde jet by a flock of geese that were sucked into its engines.

Air France contended that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had failed to perform required "runway sweeps" to frighten birds away before every takeoff or landing of a Concorde flight.

Air France said repairs to the plane after the 1995 landing took five days and cost more than \$ 9 million. No one was injured.

Neither the Port Authority nor the airline would discuss the matter, which was reported on Monday by The Star-Ledger of Newark, New Jersey.



23RD INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS TO BE HELD IN CHINA 11-17TH AUGUST 2002

At the 22nd International Ornithological Congress held in Durban, South Africa, 16-23 August 1998, the International Ornithological Committee voted to accept the invitation from the Chinese ornithologists to host the 23rd International Ornithological Congress in Beijing, China on 11-17 August 2002. Information can be obtained via e-mail <infocenter@ioc.org.cn>, via the internet at <http://www.ioc.org.cn>, or via the home page of the 22nd congress at <http://www.ioc.org.za>, it will be possible to register and to submit abstracts via the internet. The following are contact addresses of people responsible for the 23rd Congress in Beijing. **Professor Xu Weishu, Secretary-General of the 23rd Congress**, Beijing Natural History Museum, 1-1-302, Beijing Science and Technology Commission Apt., Balizhuang, Haidian District, Beijing 100037, CHINA. Phone & Fax: + 86-10-6846-5604; e-mail <s-g@ioc.org.cn>. **The Honorable Liu Feng, Assistant Secretary-General of the 23rd Congress**, China International Conference Center for Science and Technology, Xueyuan Nan Road, Beijing 100081, CHINA. Phone: + 86-10-6217-4953; Fax: + 86-10-6218-0142; e-mail <liufeng@public.bta.net.cn>. Requests to be included on the mailing list for brochures and for information on the 23rd Congress should be sent to the Secretary-General or the Assistant Secretary-General of the 23rd Congress. **Dr Fernando Spina, Chair, Scientific Program Committee, 23rd Congress**, Istituto Nazionale per la Fauna Selvatica, Via Ca' Fornacetta 9, 1-40064 Ozzano Emilia (BO), ITALY. Phone: + 39-51-65-12-111; Fax: + 39-51-79-66- 28; e-mail <infsioc@iperbole.bologna.it>. All inquiries about the scientific program of the 23rd congress, as well as comments and suggestions for the general program, plenary lectures, and symposia should be sent to him. **Dr Walter J. Bock,**

President of the 23rd Congress, Department of Biological Sciences, Columbia University, 1200 Amsterdam Avenue, Mail Box 5521, New York, NY 10027-7004, USA. Phone: + 1-212-854-4487; Fax: 1-212-865-8246; e-mail <wb4@columbia.edu>. General questions and comments should be sent to him. **Dr Dominique G. Homberger**, Secretary of the International Ornithological Committee, Department of Biological Sciences, 508 Life Sciences Building, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-1715, USA. Phone: + 1-504-388-1747; Fax: + 1-504-388-2597; e-mail <zodhomb@lsu.edu>. Inquiries about the International Ornithological Committee should be sent to her.



REVIEW

COMMUNITIES & CONSERVATION

Edited by : Ashish Kothari and others, Published by : Sage Publications, New Delhi, 505 pages. Price : Rs 495/- (cloth), Rs 325/- (paper)

In 1967 I attended the First International Short Course on Management of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves, organised by the IUCN and the University of Wisconsin in the USA. We had a splendid time for 6 weeks visiting some of the grandest natural areas of the world, and attended lectures by the leaders of the emerging conservation movement. Much emphasis was laid on the fragility of nature. In one park a machine was demonstrated which simulated the impact of human feet on the soil to impress upon us the importance of treading lightly on the earth. At the same time the Course emphasised that with proper planning thousands of visitors could enjoy the scenery and wildlife of the park and "yet leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

In the Grand Teton National Park in the Rockies 6000 people can be accommodated in the night. The Principle of Built-in Friction enunciated by Sir Frank Fraser Darling was put to good use. 99% of the people prefer to sit in their cars and watch the scene around them. Only 1% want to walk in the wilderness. A good hard-topped road prevents erosion and at the same time prevents people from spoiling the wilderness by entering it.

But in this Course, 30 years ago, we learnt very little about the problems of dealing with residents within the Park. Wilderness had to be cleansed of humanity and parks had to consist only of unimpaired natural habitat and their denizens. These conservation ideas proliferated rapidly and widely through the two major organisations concerned with the

saving of the natural world — the World Wildlife Fund and the IUCN, now known as the World Conservation Union. While many scientific projects were initiated to study the ecology of wild animals, the population dynamics of predators and prey, the vital importance of separate ecological niches for different species of life, a major problem in India and other countries on the role of tribals and resident populations in areas recently designated as sanctuaries and national parks was not considered at all. Obviously this was a serious shortcoming and it is only now that the problems of people within parks is recognised as one of the most serious constraints from the ecological point of view.

In the Survey of Environment 1998 published by The Hindu newspaper, Madhav Gadgil has an interesting point to make. He denigrates the elitist genesis of the conservation movement in India. He refers to a meeting in Bangalore in the early 70s where there was a discussion about the monkey menace in our cities, and also to the destruction of crops in rural areas by elephants. With regard to the monkeys it was thought necessary to deport them out of bounds of the city so that the citizens should not be troubled. But with regard to the elephants the villagers needed to be educated about the value of wildlife. Over the years this favouritism for city dwellers is slowly diminishing but there is no doubt that the burden of wildlife protection falls heavily on the rural population.

In the book under review we have a very complete discussion about the problems of humanity in our natural areas. We are also informed about the age-long ecological wisdom of tribals and local residents and the importance of taking their interests into account when producing management plans for our sanctuaries.

The book consists of 4 parts. In the Introduction the issue and prospects of community based conservation and the diversity and sustainability of community based conservation are discussed. In Part 2 there is a discussion about the problems in other countries including the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In Part 3 the emerging issues as a result of the worldwide movement for empowering local people, and protecting the rights of communities are discussed by various experts. In Part 4 there are case studies relating to some of the natural areas of India such as the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Sanctuary, Chinnar Sanctuary, Kailadevi and Dalma Sanctuaries and others.

This is a book which will undoubtedly play a significant part in the future conservation movement of our country.

Zafar Futehally

**Please participate in the Asian
Mid-winter Waterfowl Census :**

9th - 24th January 1999

**Contact your Regional
Coordinator for further details
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Editor



Front Cover : Male Painted Snipe (*Rostratula bengalensis*) approaching nest. This wetland bird is more closely related to jacanas than the true snipes and exhibits strongly developed sexual dimorphism. Builds its nest among emergent vegetation in swamps, marshes, and overgrown paddy fields. The brighter female is polyandrous and may lay several clutches, each for a different male. Nest building, incubation and chick rearing tasks are exclusive to the male snipe. Photo : M. Venkataswamappa & R.S. Suresh.

Back Cover : Male Indian Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*). This magnificent song bird frequents well wooded forest tracks, bamboo facies, hill-stations and deciduous foothills forest. Lucidly sings with several rich flute melodious notes altered with long pauses. The shama builds its nest in the hollows of trees and bamboo during May-June. Photo : M. Venkataswamappa & R.S. Suresh.

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